

District 4 Fall Fishing Report

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District 4 Reservoirs –

District 4 has two reservoirs it manages: Bluestone reservoir (2040 acres - Summers County) and R.D. Bailey (630 acres -Wyoming, Mingo Counties). Bluestone is more riverine-like and offers good smallmouth as well as largemouth bass fishing. R.D. Bailey holds citation-sized spotted bass in comparison. Target Bluestone and R.D. Bailey bass early and late with topwater lures such as buzz baits, skitter pops, and torpedoes. After the sun comes up fish can be found shallower than summer due to cooling water. Target any structure or change in contour. Spinnerbaits are good search baits to find active bass, then use finesse lures such as soft plastics and light-weight jig offerings to entice them to bite as throwback baits if needed. Finesse baits and soft plastics are also good choices once feeding fish are located or the bite becomes difficult. Downsize your offering as well if fish begin to ignore what you are throwing. Jigs and jig/pig combinations excel as temperatures fall into early winter for bass. In late fall on Bluestone, hardy anglers can find success using a float and fly rig for bass, and targeting areas warmed by the sun later in the afternoon using jig combinations. Fish will congregate to areas of preferred water temperature even if only a few degrees different than surrounding water.

Bluestone also holds an impressive crappie population. Target them using minnows rigged on jigheads or artificial crappie jigs and lures. Roadrunners are also good artificial baits for crappie. Try various depths until the fish let you know what depth is optimal. Striped and hybrid striped bass can also be found at Bluestone while only hybrid striped bass are stocked into R. D. Bailey. Their main forage is shad which they follow and can be located by their surface feeding activity as they corral shad into shallow areas to feed. Target these fish from a distance with spoons, jigs, spinners, and surface plugs that imitate shad. Cast past the jumping shad and reel your lure through at various depths and speeds until you connect on a fish. True bass (hybrid/striped) will be found close to shad throughout the cooler fall months. Weighted shad-imitating lures such as the Little George or blade baits can be effective for deeper depths for stripers and hybrids. A large Zoom Fluke is also a great bait due to how well it imitates a shad.

Blue catfish are present at R.D. Bailey reservoir due to WVDNR stockings. Blue catfish can be caught on fresh cut bait and live bait. They will also hit artificial lures. Past surveys indicate some R.D. Bailey blue catfish reaching 24" or greater. They have room to grow, the current US world record blue catfish from Kerr Reservoir on the NC/VA line is 143 pounds! Please keep the WVDNR informed of any exceptional blue catfish catches from this lake! R.D. Bailey also offers great hunting on the surrounding 17,280 acres of mostly accessible wildlife management area (WMA) land. Plan your fall getaway to take advantage of good fall fishing and hunting at R.D. Bailey Lake.

District 4 Rivers/Streams -

The New, Greenbrier, Gauley, Meadow, Bluestone, and Guyandotte Rivers are all good choices for fall fishing trips in District 4. Anglers should check the appropriate USGS gauges and find flows which are suitable for their style of fishing. One can wade or float in kayaks/personal pontoon boats, but anglers

should educate themselves or contact the district office because many sections of these rivers are dangerous and require expert skills to navigate. As fall progresses, fish will bite throughout the day and eventually concentrate feeding during the warmest part of the day. For fall smallmouth excursions, anglers should try their favorite jerkbaits, jig combinations, and swimbaits. Spinnerbaits can be deadly on fall smallmouth when waters are up with white or chartreuse being favorite colors. Soft plastics such as tubes, senkos, and creature baits are always effective for smallmouth and become more so as temperature levels drop into winter. Surface lures early and late are also good choices in early fall. Observant anglers watch the fish and what they are doing then make future offerings based on their reactions. Finally, a quick cast back with a soft plastic after a search bait or surface lure missed strike will often prove fruitful.

To increase your catch, savvy anglers experiment with new techniques, pay attention to detail, and are out early and late. Fly-fishing may offer smallmouth something they don't typically see from anglers and can be productive. Woolly buggers in larger sizes in olive, black, and an occasional odd color such as purple or chartreuse are excellent choices. One doesn't have to cast far especially if floating. Be sure to add micro split shot as needed to ensure your offering gets down deep enough. Often a strike will come as the fly is swinging back to the angler after the main drift. Hellgrammite, crayfish patterns and minnow patterns such as the clouser minnow in smaller sizes are also super choices for smallmouth.

Muskellunge are present in most District 4 rivers. Anglers should target these explosive fish early in the fall with spinners and bucktails in their favorite colors/blade colors. You should keep a large soft plastic or finesse bait close as a throwback bait after a fish shows itself on a searching bait. Later as water cools glide baits and large soft plastics become favored baits, but retrieval speed should also slow down. With muskellunge, the big issue is being prepared to catch one. Musky anglers always travel with hook cutters, long needle nose pliers, and a suitable net. A quick efficient release will ensure survival of these magnificent fish to be caught again. The river walleye bite will also get better as temperature levels drop into winter. Walleye, like muskellunge, are cool-water fish and will be active during colder months due to their temperature preferences. The walleye bite will continue into the spring and peak when they go through their spawning rituals (late February/March). A minnow-tipped jig and large jerkbaits work well for walleye; as do crawler harnesses popular in the Great Lakes. Be sure to consult the latest WVDNR regulations to determine current walleye creel/bag limits.

For river channel catfish and flathead catfish, anglers try fishing under low light (dawn, dusk) and at night in slack water areas adjacent to flow in the New, Gauley, and other D4 rivers through the fall. Large carp are also present in most major rivers and impoundments of the district and can be targeted with homemade dough balls under a bobber or on a basic river rig. Many doughball recipes exist online or make up your own. My uncle passed on a recipe once using cornmeal, flour, bacon grease, and powdered Jell-O mixes that worked very well on the Kanawha River while growing up. Orange, lemon, and strawberry all seemed to work well for the Jell-O flavors, or try something new. Targeting carp or catfish is great way to get a kid or someone new interested in fishing.

Several District 4 trout streams receive fall stockings of catchable trout by the WVDNR including Big Clear Creek, Anthony Creek, Glade Creek of the New, and RD Bailey tailwaters. Check the WVDNR website or Anglers should consult the regulations for further details. Fall is a great time to fish for trout, either stocked, native or wild in West Virginia due to the splendid scenery, changing fall leaves, and favorable temperature levels. The biggest issue will be adequate flows in streams. Savvy fall trout anglers keep a close watch on weather systems and USGS flow gauges and target their favorite waters under optimal flows. A difference of a few inches can make a big difference in fish activity and angler success so try lures

such as trout magnets, spinners, small crankbaits and jerkbaits. As fall progresses into winter, slow down your retrieve with all artificials. Fish being cold blooded won't be as quick to chase fast moving lures when it's cold. However, if the lure is presented SLOWLY in front of them it can be a different outcome! An excellent choice for larger trout during colder months is a small F9 (or smaller) floating rapala in gold or silver, retrieved very slowly with short pauses. AC shiners in smaller sizes are also excellent choices for this technique.

Finally, as fall progresses into early winter, live bait and powerbait will become more effective again for trout. Salmon eggs are also a great choice during cooler fall trout excursions. For the fly angler, terrestrials such as an ant or beetle imitation are excellent choices in early fall. Hopper imitations can also create explosive strikes from early fall trout. The hopper imitations should be fished close to grass-lined stream edges later in the day and into evening. As temperature levels drop and fall progresses, nymphs and streamers are excellent fly choices. Sometimes a wet fly stripped across current will work well with favored patterns include the black gnat, leadwing coachman, hornberg, march brown, and gold ribbed hare's ear wet versions. The prince nymph can be fished this way with its upright wings like the mentioned classic wet flies.

District 4 Small Impoundments -

Many West Virginians are hunters, therefore fishing pressure drops off tremendously on our waters once hunting season begins. Small impoundments in the fall are great places to target bass and bluegill using artificials such as spinners, small crankbaits, and soft plastic baits. Jig/pig combinations also work well around beaver huts and structure for bass. Stephens Lake is a good destination for fall bass fishing close to Beckley. A topwater lure can also be the ticket for bass on a warm fall afternoon/evening on WV small impoundments. Channel catfish will continue to bite into the fall in WV small impoundments and anglers should try a gob of nightcrawlers, cut bait, or any 'stinkbait' under a bobber or on a basic river rig. Channel catfish have a great sense of smell and can detect potential prey far away, therefore many anglers favor offerings which appeal to catfish's sense of smell. Channel catfish are also more active under low light conditions so concentrate your efforts around dawn, dusk, and at night for greater success on these whiskered good-tasting fish.

Summit Lake in Greenbrier County is scheduled to be stocked in October with trout. Anglers should try powerbait or live bait under a bobber or on a basic river rig for stocked trout. Small crankbaits and spinners are also productive if artificial lures are your preferred method. When fishing Summit Lake, one will be within the Mon National Forest and close to noted trout streams such as the Cranberry River. Adventurous anglers might wish to consider an overnight fishing/camping trip. Near Summit Lake, one can find the Fisherman's Trail which leads to the Cranberry River. After a downhill hike, Fisherman's trail will place the angler in the middle of a gated (no vehicles) section of the Cranberry River and close to marked campsites along the river maintained by the USFS. Fall can be a great time to explore the area around Summit Lake. There are also plenty of hunting opportunities close-by in the Mon National Forest to create a 'cast and blast' getaway, pick your quarry in season, location and go!